

VZCZCXRO1586  
RR RUEHAG RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLZ RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHTL #0406/01 3331148  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 281148Z NOV 08  
FM AMEMBASSY TALLINN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0942  
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2636  
RUEHRA/AMEMBASSY RIGA 3012  
RUEHVL/AMEMBASSY VILNIUS 6758

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TALLINN 000406

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EUR/NB MIGUEL RODRIGUES

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RU](#) [EN](#)  
SUBJECT: SNAPSHOT: GROWING UP RUSSIAN IN ESTONIA

REF: A) TALLINN 388  
B) 07 TALLINN 280  
C) 07 TALLINN 488

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Eight years into the Government of Estonia's (GOE) integration policy, integration of the Russian-speaking community remains a challenge for the state, and for Estonian society at large. However, unlike their parents, ethnic Russian youth have lived their whole lives in an independent Estonia and are largely a product of the GOE's formal integration efforts. Our discussions with Russian-speaking students, their teachers and community leaders provide a snapshot of how they feel about being "Russians living in Estonia": not entirely at home here or in Russia. For many, integration is viewed as largely as a one-way street and there is still a wide cultural gap between ethnic Estonians and Russians. Russian speaking youth are not, however, looking to Russia for their future. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) In recent months we have discussed integration issues with ethnic Russian and Estonian students and civic organizers in Tallinn, Narva, and the central Estonian town of Tapa. Our anecdotal conversations demonstrated complex and mixed personal feelings among Russian speakers about the progress of integration efforts in Estonia. Some representative statements we heard from the ethnic Russian students we spoke with include the following:

- Many do not feel truly accepted in either Estonia or Russia;
- Ethnic stereotypes persist on both sides, i.e.: "Estonians are dull and calm", "Russians are loud and stubborn";
- Since the April 2007 Bronze Soldier riots, "Estonians do not trust anyone speaking Russian in public";
- Estonians do not separate "Russian" from "Soviet";
- New Estonian-language curriculum in Russian schools is either "unrealistic"... or an insufficient "quick fix";
- Language requirements for Estonian citizenship are not onerous for the youth, but they are unfair for the older Russian generation;
- Few ethnic Russian youth here see their future in Russia. While many have Estonian citizenship, they also dream of a future elsewhere in the EU.

Russian, Estonian, or Neither?

¶3. (SBU) Many of the Russian-speaking students we talked to insisted they do not judge others based on nationality, yet many cited differences in character between the two groups as an obstacle to integration.

While it is commonplace for ethnic Russian and Estonia youth to work side-by-side in restaurants, stores and offices, leisure time is another story. During the summer months, "99 percent of my time is Russian," said one. Suspicions also abound. Jelena Sotskaja, the ethnically Russian, tri-lingual Executive Director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Estonia (AmCham), told us she had heard that Estonian-language kindergartens will not allow more than two Russian-speaking students in a class because the Russian students are more outgoing and will influence the other children to speak in Russian.

14. (U) Russian-speaking students who graduate from Estonian public high schools all receive the language certification required to enroll in Estonian universities. Many of their parents, however, do not speak enough Estonian to obtain citizenship or hold a public service sector job. The parents are often Russian citizens or "stateless" gray passport holders. Estonia's remaining 110,000 gray passport holders can travel in the EU, work in Estonia, and vote in local - but not national or European - elections. Many Russian students expressed frustration with the fact that their parents, who have lived and worked in Estonia 20-30 years or more and held local citizenship during Soviet times, must now learn Estonian in order to apply for citizenship. Some complained that their parents had lost jobs and income as a result.

15. (U) Many of the young ethnic Russians we spoke to said the April 2007 "Bronze Soldier" riots in Tallinn (Ref B) contributed to the sense of separation between ethnic

TALLINN 00000406 002 OF 003

Russians and Estonians. Stanislav Tserepanov, head of one of Estonia's tiny ethnic-Russian political parties, believes the riots made what was once 'historical' tension between Russians and Estonians a "new, current issue" for youth. While students we spoke to said they view themselves as Russian, they also noted they are not considered purely Russian in Russia. Instead, they are something new: "Russians living in Estonia,- a concept which is not fully accepted in either country.

#### Russians' Place in Estonia

16. (SBU) Russian-speaking students and their teachers said they feel that Estonian society does not easily accept them. AmCham's Sotskaja believes Estonians are focused on preserving their nation and identity. Tserepanov echoed this sentiment noting he believes Estonians have become engulfed in a new wave of nationalism that excludes Russian-speakers. Developing a national pride that could unite Russians and Estonians would serve Estonia better, Tserepanov asserted. Some older members of the Russian community we spoke with said they feel that Estonians often do not separate "Russian" from "Soviet," though many of the Russians now living in Estonia also suffered under the Soviet regime. Younger students had a different view. Even though none of them remember Soviet times, they expressed nostalgia for its "easier and calmer" lifestyle.

17. (U) Language remains one of the most divisive issues. Students and other members of the ethnic Russian community complained that in Estonia "integration" has seemed more like "assimilation." While none of our young interlocutors complained about having to learn Estonian language and culture, they expressed frustration that Estonians don't reciprocate Russian-speakers' efforts. (Note: In February, Estonian President Ilves said in an interview to the BBC that he does not study Russian because it would be "recognizing 50 years of Soviet occupation." However, in November, Ilves visited schools, worksites and a church in ethnically-Russian Ida-Virumaa county and promised to return soon and

address the public in the Russian language. End Note.) Many students worried about their ability to preserve their mother tongue and national identity. On this issue, however, students in Tallinn and Narva differed. Russian speakers in Tallinn insisted on the importance of preserving the Russian culture and community throughout Estonia. Students in the border city of Narva (98 percent ethnic Russian), expressed a belief that Estonia only needed to preserve Russian culture and language in areas where the majority of the population is Russian.

18. (U) Some of the students we spoke with complained that the GOE's program to increase the number of subjects taught in Estonian at Russian-language high schools will not help significantly. One asked, "How can a Russian learn physics in Estonian, if the subject is hard enough to understand in his first language?" While their feelings were sincere, this is a much different view from the majority opinion expressed in a recent major survey of Russian-speaking students (Ref A). Several students and one teacher we spoke with felt Estonian textbooks portray Russians negatively and cited this as the reason Russian students are hesitant to attend Estonian schools. Jevgeni Krishtafovitch, chairman of the youth integration organization Open Republic, and Vjateslav Konovalov, of Narva College, said that the recent establishment of Russian-language instruction at the new St. Catherine's College at Tallinn University is not a positive step. The students would benefit more from being forced to speak Estonian, they said. (NOTE: St. Catherine's College instruction does lead to full instruction in Estonian. END NOTE.)

19. (U) The students we spoke with generally view the benefits of being 'stateless' as relatively equal to Estonian citizenship. Most viewed Russian citizenship as the least preferable option. However, they acknowledged that the Russian Federation's recent decision to allow visa-free travel for stateless Estonian residents will reduce the incentive to apply for Estonian citizenship (Estonian citizens must have a visa to travel to Russia).

What the Future Holds

110. (U) While all of the students identified themselves

TALLINN 00000406 003 OF 003

as culturally Russian, they did not profess sympathy with the Russian state. None of the people we talked to said they see their future in Russia. (NOTE: Overall, however, ethnic Russians in Estonia have supported Russia on international issues, including the invasion of Georgia in August. END NOTE.) While some students noted they believe they will not have any difficulty finding employment as Russian-speakers in Europe, others were more skeptical about the future. Krishtafovitch and others insist Russian-speakers need to "invest in a future in Estonia" by learning the language and planning their future here. However, a survey of 1500 people conducted by a local Russian-language newspaper in August found that almost all those in the 15-40 age range believe they have fewer chances at employment and other opportunities than ethnic Estonians of the same age.

PHILLIPS